

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4643

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, SY, LE
SUBJ: SYRIAN VIEW OF LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS

REF: DAMASCUS 4642

1. SUMMARY:
PRESIDENTIAL POLITICAL COUNSELOR DAOUDY BELIEVES
THERE NOW ROOM FOR "GUARDED OPTIMISM" THAT A GREATER DEGREE
OF STABILIZATION IN SOUTH LEBANON IS WITHIN REACH.
END SUMMARY.

2. I COMMENTED TO DAOUDY JULY 21 THAT THE WAY LOCAL
MEDIA HAD BEEN TALKING UP A SYRIAN POLITICAL INITIATIVE
IN THE LAST FEW DAYS SUGGESTED OFFICIAL OPTIMISM ABOUT AN
IMMINENT BREAKTHROUGH. (TODAY'S NEWS FEATURED COS SHIHABI'S
MEETING IN CHATOURA WITH LEBANESE COMMANDER KHOURI AND
FATAH'S ABU ILAD.) ASKED DAOUDY WHAT SHIFT IN PALESTINIAN
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AND LEBANESE THINKING LAY BEHIND THIS NEW SENSE OF OPTIMISM
IN DAMASCUS ABOUT THE SOUTH OF LEBANON?

3. DAOUDY REPLIED THAT HE BELIEVED INTERACTION OF TWO FACTORS
HAD SERVED TO MAKE THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP MORE RECEPTIVE
TO A NEW PUSH TOWARDS STABILIZATION OF THE BORDER AREA.
FIRST, THERE WAS THE MAJOR EXODUS OF LEBANESE CITIZENS FROM

THE SOUTHERN AREAS (DAOUDI PUT THIS AT ABOUT 200,000). HE MENTIONED THE CALL ON HIM, AND SUBSEQUENTLY ON ASSAD, BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "FRONT FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE SOUTH." THIS PRUELY LEBANESE DELEGATION INDICTED PALESTINIANS, CHRISTIAN MILITIA AND ISRAELIS ALIKE. THEIR DEMAND THAT THEY BE ALLOWED TO LIVE IN PEACE AND SECURITY WITHOUT INTERFERENCE FROM ANY ONE OF ABOVE PARTIES HAD MADE A STRONG IMPRESSION IN DAMASCUS. SECOND, AND RELATED WAS THE OPEN COOPERATION BETWEEN CERTAIN CHRISTIAN MILITIA AND ISRAEL.

4. DAOUDI ACKNOWLEDGED NEITHER FACTOR WAS NEW BUT WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME, THEIR INTER-RELATIONSHIP HAD MADE THE PALESTINIANS INCREASINGLY UNCOMFORTABLE. THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP REALIZED THAT LEBANESE POPULAR OPINION INCREASINGLY HELD PALESTINIAN INTRANSIGENCE OVER THE SOUTHERN BORDER RESPONSIBLE FOR HELPING CEMENT A LINK BETWEEN THE MILITIA AND THE ISRAELIS. THIS, TOGETHER WITH THE PATHETIC STATE OF THE LEBANESE REFUGEES, CONSTITUTED A STRONG INCENTIVE FOR THE PALESTINIANS TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER WITHDRAWAL OF THEIR FIGHTER FROM THE SOUTHERN BORDER.

5. OF NECESSITY THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA WOULD HAVE TO BE WITHDRAWN AS WELL--"IT MUST BE A PACKAGE" DAOUDY SAID. DAOUDY AGREED THAT SARKIS COULD NOT ENFORCE SUCH AN AGREEMENT ON THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA. THEY WOULD RESPOND TO ORDERS ONLY FROM THE LEBANESE NATIONAL FRONT.
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YM DAOUDY PREDICTED THAT IF THERE IS A BREAKTHROUGH, AND HE EMPHASIZED THERE WAS STILL THE CHANCE SOME UNKNOWN FACTORS COULD REVERSE SYRIAN OPTIMISM, WE COULD SEE TANGIBLE RESULTS IN THE COMING DAYS. THIS WOULD BE THE FIRST POSITIVE TURNING POINT IN THE DRIFT TOWARDS CONTINUOUS CONFRONTATION IN SOUTH LEBANON SINCE THERIYADH AND CAIRO SUMMITS LAST FALL.

7. HE SAID ASSAD REMAINS HEAVILY PREOCCUPIED WITH SOUTH LEBANON AND THE DANGERS THIS CONSTITUTED FOR SYRIA. HE SAID THAT PRESIDENT IS ALSO PERSUADED THAT THE OPEN COOPERATION BETWEEN CHRISTIAN MILITIA AND ISRAEL IS AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE ARAB WORLD WHICH MUST BE ENDED. HE OBSERVED THAT IF A WITHDRAWAL TAKES PLACE AND A LEBANESE FORCE, HOWEVER ILL TRAINED AND IN ONLY SYMBOLIC NUMBERS, IS INSERTED ALONG THE BORDER, HE ASSUMED THE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT MOVE AGAINST BORDER VILLAGES. REPLIED THAT EVERYTHING I HAD READ SUPPORTED THIS ASSUMPTION. ISRAEL IS NOT LOOKING FOR TROUBLE IN THE SOUTH AND WOULD WELCOME INSERTION OF LEBANESE REGULARS IN THAT AREA.

8. COMMENT:

APPEARS TO US THAT SYRIANS HAVE LATCHED ONTO AND
ARE TRYING CLAIM CREDIT FOR WHAT WERE IN ORIGIN
INITIATIVES OF KAMEL AL-ASSAD AND PLO LEADER HANI
AL-HASSAN.
MURPHY

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